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AUTHOR Sheppard, Alice; Gange, Julie
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ABSTRACT

The mass magazine industry offers new role images for women in contemporary magazines, assuming that they reflect the psychological needs of women's changing sex-role identities. To determine whether women classified as androgynous by the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) would prefer nontraditional models of femininity, 101 college women were asked to complete the BSRI and rate 55 magazine covers on their interest in reading the magazine. All subjects preferred the traditional women's magazines, suggesting that androgyny may not reflect a change in sex-role identity as in values and standards of behavior. Of the four magazine clusters related to sex role, androgynous women gave high ratings to sports and science magazines. In contrast, stereotypic females gave high ratings to fine arts/sophisticated magazines, with a slight edge to magazines oriented to the home. The findings failed to confirm the hypothesis that psychological androgyny would be related to diverging sex-role images. (Author/JAC)

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Do Androgynous Women Reject Femininity? An Investigation of Sex Role and Magazine Choice

Alice Sheppard and Julie Gange

Eastern Oregon State College

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Paper presented at the meeting of the Western Psychological Association, Sacramento, April 1982.

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Do Androgynous Women Reject Femininity? An Investigation of Sex Role and Magazine Choice

The mass magazine industry, originally aimed at extolling the virtues of traditional femininity, today offers new role images for women in contemporary magazines such as *Ms.*, *New Woman*, *Working Woman*, and *Self*. It has been assumed that these newer magazines reflect the psychological needs and interests of women's changing sex-role identities--a belief supported by previous research by one of the authors. In that study (Sheppard, Note 1), a factor analysis of 55 magazines identified two clusters of women's magazines, a traditional one composed of *Vogue*, *Glamour*, and *Seventeen* and a nontraditinal cluster which included *Working Woman*, *Ms.*, *Prevention*, and *New Woman*.

The dichotomous clustering of women's magazines was incorporated into the present study in which it was hypothesized that women classified as androgynous on the Bem Sex Role Inventory would prefer nontraditional models of femininity, while those designated as stereotypic feminine would select traditional women's magazines. It was also anticipated that such interest areas as the home, interpersonal relations, business, science, and sports would be differentially related to sex-role categories.

Method

Subjects

One hundred and one women enrolled in the general psychology class participated in the study. Their average age was 19.8 and their backgrounds were predominantly rural. Slightly over half indicated that they grew up in rural towns with a population below 10,000, while another third came from

communities with a population of 10,000-50,000. Males were included in the original study, while the present analyses include only the females.

Bem Sex Role Inventory

The Bem Sex Role Inventory was administered in order to obtain a measure of androgyny, the combination of masculine and feminine traits. While Bem originally advocated a t-ratio method of scoring (e.g., Bem, 1976), more recent work has advocated use of the median split technique (see Downing, 1979). Accordingly, individuals above both the median of femininity (4.95) and of masculinity (4.75) were classified as androgynous; those below both medians were viewed as undifferentiated. Individuals above the median for femininity were seen as stereotypic; those above the median for masculinity only were labeled "cross-sexed." In the present sample participants were classified as follows: androgynous (34.7%), stereotypic (39.6%), cross-sexed (13.9%) and undifferentiated (11.8%).

Magazine Covers

A total of 55 magazines were selected on the basis of a preliminary study as well as with the intent of including a range of sex-role images and sex-typed interests. These included feminine areas of fashion, food, home, the arts, and social interests and masculine areas of sports, cars, science, and the outdoors. Covers of magazines were photographed for presentation as slides.

Procedures

Instructions for the 7-point magazine rating scale were as follows:

> You are going to see a series of magazine covers presented as slides. For each one, please indicate on your rating scale the degree to which you would like to read or would not like

to read this magazine. Do this by circling a number from "1"(not like to read at all) to "7" (like very much to read). If you have no response to the magazine, consider how likely you might be to pick it up in a friend's house, doctor's office, or from the newsstand--and rate it in the same way. Please do not skip any.

Subjects rated the magazines in the first session and completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory several days later. An additional eight women comoleted only the magazine ratings.

Factors from the previous study of 198 women were used to define the magazine clusters. Means for each cluster (see Tables 1 & 2) were entered into an analysis of covariance with sex role type (four groups) by community size (three levels) and covariates age and education. Analysis of variance was also used to permit use of the entire sample, as seven subjects left one or more of the demographic variables blank.

Results

Neither traditional nor nontraditional magazine clusters showed a relationship to sex role category. Thus, the major hypothesis was not supported, and the meaning of androgyny could not be described with reference to either traditional or nontraditional magazine images. Nevertheless, the analysis of variance revealed significant relationships for sports magazines, $F(3,97) = 5.47$, $p < .01$, for home magazines, $F(3,97) = 3.64$, $p < .05$, for arts and leisure, $F(3,97) = 2.82$, $p < .05$, and for science, $F(3, 80) = 2.63$, $p = .056$. Age was related to ratings of traditional magazines,

interpersonal interests, and movie magazines; education influenced ratings of traditional magazines, movie magazines, and youth-oriented ones.

Discussion

The present study failed to confirm the hypothesis that psychological androgyny would be related to diverging sex-role images. Androgynous women, as well as the three other sex-role types, all preferred traditional magazines. This suggests that androgyny may not reflect a change in sex-role identity, as in values and standards of behavior. Of the four magazine clusters which were related to sex role, androgynous women showed high ratings of sports and science magazines. In addition to their feminine interests, they thus pursue intellectual and physical activities. In contrast, stereotypic females led in fine arts/sophisticated magazines, with a slight edge in magazines oriented to the home. The feminine woman of today continues her domestic role, while refining it in the direction of elegance, art, and fine dining.

In short, androgyny does not represent a rejection of traditional values, as the *Glamour-Vogue-Seventeen* cluster continues to dominate. Moreover, the magazine *Self*, launched several years ago to focus on "the exuberant concern for body and mind" (Wilson, 1979, p. 6), was analyzed into the traditional women's cluster. Even women who outwardly reflect new or independent standard of sex-role identity, continue to maintain some degree of fantasy identification with traditional femininity. The concept of androgyny, though of some explanatory value, is not sufficient to predict response to feminine role models for college students. Their fantasy identifications may, in fact, be necessary to provide assurance for the step beyond.

Reference Note

1. Sheppard, A. Perceptions of masculinity and femininity as revealed by response to popular magazines. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Women in Psychology, Los Angeles, March 1980.

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Wilson, P. S. From the editor. Self, January 1979, p. 6.

Table 1

Mean Ratings of Traditional and Nontraditional Magazine Clusters by BSRI Categories

BSRI Type[c]	n	Traditional[a] Magazines	Nontraditional[b] Magazines
Undifferentiated	12	4.96	4.17
Cross-sexed	14	5.07	3.83
Stereotypic	40	5.06	4.26
Androgynous	35	5.49	4.72

[a]Traditional magazines included *Glamour*, *Self*, *Seventeen*, and *Vogue*.

[b]Nontraditional magazines included *Ms.*, *New Woman*, and *Working Woman*.

[c]BSRI showed no significant effects on either set of magazines.

Table 2

Mean Ratings of Magazine Clusters Showing

Greatest Relation to BSRI Scores

	BSRI Category				
	Undifferentiated	Cross-sexed	Stereotypic	Androgynous	p
Sports *Outdoor Life* *Sports Illustrated* *Woman Sports*	2.81	3.60	3.08	4.18	< .01
Home *Better Homes & Gardens* *House Beautiful* *Sunset*	3.33	4.24	4.62	4.50	< .02
Arts & Leisure *Art Forum* *Gourmet* *New Yorker*	2.53	2.67	3.52	2.95	< .05
Science *Natural History* *Popular Science* *Scientific American*	1.86	1.88	2.14	2.61	< .06[a]

[a]Significance level based on analysis of covariance (N = 94); all other analyses based on entire sample (N = 101).